

Extension of Remarks
Representative Jan Schakowsky
World AIDS Day
December 1, 2011

Mr. Speaker,

As we pause to reflect on World AIDS Day, I want to thank the many activists and advocates who work tirelessly – every day – to focus increased attention on HIV/AIDS education, treatment and prevention. I want to recognize the great work of David Munar and the AIDS Foundation of Chicago, and Mark Ishaug and AIDS United, who – along with countless organizations across the country and world – are working to end HIV/AIDS and to ensure that people with HIV/AIDS live longer and better lives.

HIV/AIDS is one of the world's most pressing global health challenges. It is a danger to global security and to the future of people around the world. Nearly 35 million people are living with HIV/AIDS around the world, including over one million Americans. Our community, our nation and the entire world are threatened by this terrible pandemic.

As the HIV virus has spread, the face of its victims has changed. Women now account for 52 percent of the adults living with HIV/AIDS around the world. In regions like sub-Saharan Africa,

gender inequalities have left women particularly vulnerable to infection. The battle to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS among women will ultimately hinge on our ability to empower them with the information and the tools needed to protect themselves, their families and their communities. That is one of the reasons that I have been such a strong supporter of microbicides research.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has not spared the world's children. Last year there were 3.4 million children across the globe living with HIV, and the disease has left more than 16.6 million AIDS orphans, most of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa, in its wake.

Despite the many advances of the last thirty years, as the pandemic has grown, so have the challenges. Despite the significant expansion of treatment programs, only 47% of the 14.2 million people who were eligible for treatment were receiving it by the end of last year. Despite the 21% drop in deaths from AIDS since 2005, last year 1.8 million people died of AIDS. HIV remains a leading cause of death worldwide and the number one cause of death in Africa.

The United States has a responsibility to lead the fight against HIV/AIDS by containing the spread of the virus, helping to provide treatment, and investing in a cure. It is critical that we continue to meet this responsibility, especially after last week's announcement by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria that they cannot fund any new grants for at least two years because of the global financial crisis.

To ensure that the millions of people battling HIV/AIDS do not become collateral damage of the economic downturn, and to uphold our responsibility as a global leader in the fight against HIV/AIDS, I will do whatever I can to ensure that we maintain commitment to domestic and global AIDS programs. That includes funding for PEPFAR and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria, as well as vital funding for domestic programs like the Ryan White CARE Act, and the Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS Program, and especially, the AIDS Drug Assistance Program, given that some states are changing the income eligibility criteria for that program, while others are seeing waiting lists.

While we have come far in the fight, we still have a long way to go and we cannot afford to become complacent.